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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: DISCUSSION WITH PRESIDENT ARROYO ON BURMA

REF: A. A. STATE 142628
[1](#)B. B. MANILA 3393
[1](#)C. C. MANILA 3335 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: I sat down today for a private meeting with Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo. I thanked them for their vocal and

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proactive stance on Burma, and floated the idea of a special ASEAN envoy for Burma -- perhaps even former Philippine President Fidel Ramos. President Arroyo and Romulo emphasized the need for a continued tough stance on Burma, and were very receptive to the idea of an ASEAN envoy, particularly Ramos. President Arroyo is eager to sign a letter on Burma as discussed at Secretary Rice's UNGA event with women leaders. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Foreign Secretary Romulo and I arrived at the palace at the same time and discussed Burma as we walked in to see President Arroyo. Romulo told me that President Arroyo and he had both raised their strong concerns about Burma during their recent visit to India (reftel C). Romulo said that he thought that the Burmese regime looked weaker now than ever before, but the international community needed to maintain pressure in order to achieve tangible progress. He reiterated his view that China -- rather than India -- was the key to real reform in Burma, and again suggested that a joint statement by former Nobel Peace Prize laureates might be useful in pressuring the junta (reftel B).

[1](#)3. (C) When President Arroyo joined us, I underscored our appreciation for the continued role she and her government were playing in urging a forward-leaning stance by ASEAN regarding Burma, and stressed the importance of concrete action by ASEAN to press the Burmese regime to end its coercive tactics and move toward democracy, including through an active role for UN Special Adviser Gambari. President Arroyo echoed Foreign Secretary Romulo's emphasis on the need for continued pressure on the Burmese junta and strong leadership on the part of ASEAN. She noted that she had used the occasion of the death of Burmese Gen. Soe Win to call for greater commitment to democratization by Burma's leaders. While she felt we needed to keep pushing Burma, she confessed to a lack of optimism regarding our ability to influence the regime's behavior.

[1](#)4. (C) President Arroyo liked the idea of having ASEAN name a senior special envoy to engage more actively on the Burma issue. I mentioned former Philippine President Ramos as a possible candidate for such a position and she responded very positively to the idea of Ramos for the position, noting that

he had visited Burma as Philippine President.

15. (C) Recalling the September meeting of the Women Leaders Working Group hosted by Secretary Rice, President Arroyo asked about the status of a letter calling for the release of detained NLD opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, which President Arroyo understood was being drafted by the State Department. President Arroyo said she had recently discussed Burma with New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, and that both of them were eager to sign such a letter.
KENNEY